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THE BIBLE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

BIBLE study is the act of furnishing nourishment to the divine life which exists in the individual soul; or, we may describe it as *THE NEED OF SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE* the force which keeps alive the spark of divine life, increasing its brilliancy and constantly adding to its power. Three things are true: (1) The spiritual life within us stands just as much in need of nourishment, of assistance in its growth, as do the physical life and the intellectual life. We may not say that the religious or spiritual life will take care of itself because it is divine. God has given us bodies and minds, but they are so constituted that they will starve and die if not fed; the same law holds good in the religious life. (2) Everything which contributes toward the legitimate development of the inner religious life will deepen and enrich one's personal experience in all of its phases, the outward as well as the inner. (3) Of all agencies which may serve as sources of help in the training and strengthening of the religious life, the Bible when studied is the most helpful and is indispensable.

For the cultivation of the devotional spirit, no literature, not even the literature of modern Christian nations, contains such *THE BIBLE AS AN AID TO DEVOTION* helps to prayer and praise and holy communion with the Spirit in and around us, as do the pages of the Bible. We realize that for most of us the ritual of ancient Israel has been supplanted by the simpler ceremonial of New Testament times. But we do well to remember that the old ritual as it stands in Holy Writ was one used largely

by Jesus himself; that this ritual, complex and mysterious as it may now seem to be, was at one time the honest and sincere expression of the relationship of man to God and of God to man on the part of a people rightly called holy because they had been the agency chosen by God himself for the revelation of himself to all humanity. This ceremonial, expressing the religious life which was the divinely authorized precursor of the Christ, must contain rich food for those who, like all the people of those times, have not yet reached in their religious growth the higher things of Christianity. Even believers require different kinds of food: some may be ready for the strong meat of the gospel, while for others a better diet will be found in the milk of an earlier stage of development. We make bold to say that even today children and many adults will be better nourished if they take their food in the order God has seen fit to give it to man, viz., "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

Further, the study of the Bible when properly presented is inspirational. For the intelligent acceptance and appropriation of its materials, incorporated into creeds, has moved and controlled the greatest spirits of nineteen centuries, and through them the civilized world. No great man has wrought among his fellows, no nation has made history, except under the influence and inspiration of these books we call the Bible. Time permits no illustration, but recall how the Roman empire passed into Christian hands, recall the great movements ever since—the Reformation, the War of Independence, even the French Revolution. This Bible of ours has been the incentive; the truth gathered from its pages, even when mingled with the error of human interpretation, has been the basis of the world's most helpful, most efficient, and most startling forward steps through all these ages. And it has happened thus because this truth has entered into religious life and experience. If it has affected the lives of men in days gone by, if it is affecting their lives today, we may well believe that we, as well as they, may receive from this

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OF THE BIBLE**

Book inspiration and direction; that the study of the Bible will lift us to a higher plane of usefulness to our fellow-men.

When we seek a standard of life, to regulate our conduct, where else than in the Bible is there to be found more vivid presentation of life as it should be lived, and of life as it should not be lived? Where else is there given such pathetic illustration of the consequences of sin as is contained in the story of David's life; or more definite presentation of the rewards of righteousness? One may study history outside of the Bible and fail to find anywhere a comingling of the various elements which make up the religious life in any true proportions. Sin has made such headway in the world that apparently no instance may be found of well-rounded religious life perfect in every particular. We look in vain for a nation that has produced or expressed this ideal religious life. We look in vain for an association or organization of any kind that has furnished the world an experience that might be accepted as the true type. Individual men have approached this ideal more nearly than nations or organizations. But the men who have reached the highest place in this effort of transcendent interest to all humanity have, after all, exhibited characteristics of weakness and evidences of innate sinfulness which have made it clear that humanity in itself may not attain this supreme goal.

Does it follow, then, that the world has seen no perfect example of this life? In order that the world might have such perfect illustration of it—an illustration which all men might see and study, and by which humanity might be lifted to a still higher plane than that which it had reached through the divine help already furnished in other ways—Jesus Christ lived, taught, and died. His attitude of reverence and homage toward God, in its simplicity and sublimity, in its prayerful dependence, and in its irrepressible aspiration, was the perfect presentation of the true worship in itself and in its relation to the other factors which constitute the religious experience. His teaching concerning God as Father of the world; of humanity as a single, closely related family,

every member of which had responsibility for every other member; of the kingdom of heaven, that ideal social life in which justice and peace shall reign—these truths constitute a creed from which nothing may be subtracted; while the making of additions to it, as history has shown, leads surely to confusion and controversy.

His life in the perfection of its purity, in the pathos of its self-sacrifice, in the loftiness of its unselfish achievement, has furnished to the world principles which underlie and control all right living. In proportion, therefore, as the worship of nations, or of organizations, or of individuals is as sincere and honest as that of Jesus Christ; in proportion as their belief is as broad and deep and true as was his belief; in proportion as their life is as pure and self-sacrificing and lofty as was his life—in just such proportion will nation or organization or individual give illustration of the true religious experience.

Suppose that a man of earnest religious temperament could find elsewhere than in the Bible the material which would serve him fairly well for purposes of devotion, for a basis of belief, and for a standard of ethical life. What shall then be said in reference to the material which will serve his purpose in the realm of his inner religious life, the experience of the consciousness of sin and the longing for righteousness, the experience of a sense of fellowship with God, and appreciation of receiving God's help in time of trouble; the experience of love for God and love for man? Can the best material for the nourishment of spiritual life along these lines be found elsewhere than in the sacred Scriptures?

We wish to answer here a point sometimes made against the necessity of Bible study. It is said with apparent plausibility that, in one form or another, our modern literature contains all of the biblical element really needed for the nourishment of the divine life in man; that in the lines of poetry and the discussions of philosophy, in the treatises on ethics, and in the pages of history, one may find a really excellent substitute for the prophecies of Isaiah and his disciples, the utterances of the sages, the ethical narratives of the

Old and New Testaments, and the letters and discourses of the apostles and their co-workers. But the very fact alleged shows all the more clearly the power of the Scriptures, for if they possessed not a special power and value given from on high, their influence could not have permeated as it has all modern literature; and beyond this it is to be noted that the source of this wonderful influence thus exerted is conceded by all to have been and to be the Bible. *In these days, if never before, we are expected to go to the original sources for our information.* The one source, as well as the original source, for religious help is the Bible.

Let us not waste our time and strength in the effort to find this most precious material in a diluted form when we can so easily obtain it pure. Let us also remember that the dilution of a pure article is often only another term for adulteration. It is not an uninteresting piece of work to follow this or that author in his effort to reproduce the truth of the biblical writings according to his own fancy; but it is a far more profitable thing to study the biblical writings themselves, writings so strong, and so helpful, and so necessary to man's true life that even in diluted form they have been found most valuable.

No one can deny that in our Old and New Testament Scriptures we find the fullest and clearest presentation of the character of God. We may interpret this revelation in one way or in another, but, whatever way we adopt, the fact remains that the material to be interpreted is biblical material. If God is himself the ultimate source of all religious experience, it may surely be predicated that the richest and fullest experience will come, can come, to those only who best know him as he has made himself known, to those only who by such knowledge are in closest touch with him. In the olden days the prophet Hosea repeated pathetically the bitter complaint: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6), "they do not know Jehovah" (5:4). In these modern days men are even more foolish and run after every absurd notion which the human mind can invent. In very truth, they do not know the God of the Scriptures; and why not? Because they have not studied his character as it is revealed in the word,

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and in the flesh; or because they have studied it, alas, through glasses so dimmed with human error that the true light has been shut out.

This is true likewise of the two great corollaries of the teaching concerning God—that of sin, that of man's relation to man.

**SIN AND THE
NEED OF
FORGIVENESS**

No man has ever lived, good or bad, whose picture has not been painted in Holy Writ. You will not read many chapters before you will see clearly before your eyes your own portrait. There is no sin so base, no virtue so exalted, as not to find full illustration in these sacred narratives. You will find nowhere else so definite a location of responsibility for sin upon the individual. If you read sympathetically the words of an Old Testament prophet, or a New Testament prophet, you will in spite of yourself grow sick with the deep and overwhelming sense of sin which he depicts. In other words, your conviction of sin will be so deepened as to bring you by reaction into that state in which you may assume the right relation to your Maker. No other literature will produce this effect, unless it be literature so saturated with biblical truth as in itself to reproduce the biblical thought.

Think, too, of the educative element in the records of the lives of great leaders now following in the right path, now turned aside; at one time crowned with all the favor of a loving God; at another punished with all the severity which characterizes an impartial judge. We have already spoken of the unique life pictured to us, the life of Jesus. This is the climax of the whole; all else might perhaps be dispensed with, so long as this remained, and yet all else forms the background on which this picture rests.

Let us repeat: the study of the Bible is to be thought of as the eating of food—food not for the body or the mind, but for the soul. One may at times find elsewhere soul-food, in diluted form; if it is desired pure, and at first hand, the Bible is the one source of supply. This work of Bible study is indispensable, if one's religious life is to be strong and sturdy and alert; and if it is to be at all equal to the demands made upon it in this world of struggle and temptation.